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NORTH DAKOTA GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT PLAN

STRATEGIC PHASE



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NORTH DAKOTA GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT

This document is a continuation of the strategic phase of the North Dakota Game and Fish Department's Planning process. The strategic component sets the direction for the Game and Fish Department (Department) through 2010. The strategic component is the driving force for the other two components (inventory/evaluation and operational).

This document is compiled into three chapters. Chapter One explains the Planning process and reasons for developing it. Chapter One also explains how the Department developed the strategic component.

Chapter Two provides a perspective of the North Dakota Game and Fish Department to help the reader understand the responsibilities given to the Department through the State Constitution and legislative process. Chapter Two also identifies the policies that guide Department operations to provide fish and wildlife populations for public use and enjoyment.

Chapter Three contains plans for the Department identified programs. These plans not only set direction, but provide targets against which the Department's future progress can be measured. The programs are separated into four emphasis areas: hunting/trapping, fishing, habitat, and stewardship and enjoyment.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

A. WHAT IS PLANNING?

Planning is a process to direct the North Dakota Game and Fish Department's limited fiscal resources and manpower towards providing target levels of fish and wildlife populations and public benefits derived from them and to comply with North Dakota law. The target levels, called objectives, are identified in 23 program plans (Chapter 3). Planning is a business approach to managing the North Dakota Game and Fish Department (Department).

There are three components to our planning, each one addressing a different question (see diagram below). Although each component is developed in the sequence they will be discussed, in a fully functional system they often interact simultaneously.

The inventory/evaluation component, which answers the question "Where are we?", and "Did we get there?" is accomplished when Department employees inventory fish and wildlife populations and ask hunters and anglers about their activities. Objectives identified for each program provide a standard to measure progress. Success is evaluated through feedback from the public (advisory board meetings, legislative hearings, surveys, and general comments) and by tracking program accomplishments.

The strategic component answers the question "Where do we want to be?" by setting measurable targets (objectives) in each of the 23 programs for the year 2010.

The operational component of the plan, which answers the question "How do we get there?" involves prioritizing the many program objectives in the strategic phase and defining work projects to accomplish these objectives. When the Department develops budgets and allocates staff time, they are on their way to answering this question. This component attempts to maximize efforts towards achieving the highest priority objectives first. It ensures that the Department does not spread limited dollars and staff too thin by trying to accomplish all the objectives simultaneously.

B. WHY DEVELOP A PLANNING PROCESS?

From the earliest days of settlement in Dakota Territory the wealth of natural resources was both a comfort and a form of sustenance to the people. Regulation, however, was disregarded; perhaps few people considered the future of wildlife, and fewer still thought such boundless fish and wildlife populations could be diminished. Today only nominal representatives of some of the great prairie wildlife species are present. Our civilization has progressed with certain costs.

Audubon bighorns became extinct around 1905. Elk were killed from the open prairie. Bison now exist in captive herds only to remind us of what once was. Wolves and grizzly bears were hunted out of the plains and now exist only in wilder domains. Ducks that once darkened the skies made for unbelievable stories passed down from grandfather to father to son. We've changed the face of the land forever.

We work and live with what remains; yet some aspects are bright indeed. North Dakotans enjoy a quality of life that is unique and unsurpassed by any other state. North Dakotans live in a state that has abundant clean air, uncrowded conditions, ample open spaces, safe and clean cities, and bountiful fish and wildlife. Inherent in this quality of life are abundant opportunities to pursue outdoor recreation. Some 250 California bighorns have replaced the Audubon. White-tailed deer, wild turkey and ring-necked pheasant abound where once there were none. We enjoy the presence of moose, elk, and bighorns in both watchable and huntable numbers. Appreciative use, where people from all walks of life enjoy seeing and being in proximity to wildlife as much as they enjoy the opportunity to take them for food, is growing in importance to our quality of life.

People of the state have an opportunity to fish over 250 lakes and reservoirs, totaling over half a million acres and on numerous rivers and streams. Fishing in Lake Sakakawea and Lake Oahe for walleye and salmon is outstanding. In the past Chinook salmon fishing rivaled that of the Great Lakes. Fishing for pan fish can take place just about anywhere around the state. Devils Lake offers unique perch fishing in the winter and the Red River provides unsurpassed fishing for catfish.

The opportunities for consumptive wildlife use are also enjoyed by many North Dakotans. In wet years, waterfowl hunting is better than any other place in the nation. Upland game birds can be pursued from the middle of September to the first part of January. Harvest of species such as sandhill cranes, tundra swans, and giant Canada geese provides unique opportunities for trophy hunts. And white-tailed deer populate the entire state allowing about over 100,000 people to receive licenses.

The Game and Fish Department has limited resources--both time and money--to carry out its responsibilities. It is facing decreasing revenues and increasing costs through inflation and public demands. Very simply, the Department must set priorities to allocate its resources to meet needs of hunters and anglers, concerns of private landowners and the general public, and ensure healthy fish and wildlife populations for future generations.

The Game and Fish Department has a very dedicated staff who are willing to work hard, put in extra time, and deal with difficult situations. However, dollars can only be stretched so thin and people can only be asked to sacrifice so much before a break point is reached. Priorities must be set through tough decision making.

Projections suggest that while the human population of the state is not likely to increase significantly, the desire for fish and wildlife related outdoor recreation is likely to increase substantially. We learn and relearn the lesson that our own health, in fact our own existence, is tied to a clean environment and the associated products of the land that are indicators of that health and vigor. Many North Dakotans, city and rural dwellers alike, discover that wild things and wild places deepen our perception of the environment and our relationship to it and recharge our emotional and spiritual batteries.

Planning helps the Department make the tough decisions to ensure the quality of life we cherish. The process allows the Department to focus on providing a product (wildlife and habitat), ensuring equitable distribution of the product and making sure the public benefits from this product (hunting, fishing, wildlife viewing, etc.). The planning process will also ensure that the Department focuses on solving the most pressing problems. Most importantly, planning establishes the Game and Fish Department's vision for the future and allows the public to have input on defining that vision.

C. HOW WAS THE STRATEGIC COMPONENT DEVELOPED?

A variety of people are both directly and indirectly affected by the Game and Fish Department. The strategic component of the Planning process provides these various publics a means to share desires and concerns for fish and wildlife populations and about Department actions that provide these products.

To involve affected and interested publics in the development of its vision for the future, the Department first identified who their publics are. The Department's publics include not only constituents such as hunters, anglers, and appreciative users, but also landowners, agricultural groups, government agencies and private organizations. These organized groups and individuals were contacted for their willingness to serve in a volunteer capacity. From this pool of names, the Department formed eight to twelve member teams for each of the programs.

Each team developed a program plan to guide the management of a portion of the state's fish and wildlife resources. The program plans include a goal, objectives, issues, and strategies. The **Goal** is a description of the basic intent of the program. **Objectives** are quantified target levels of the Department's products (fish and wildlife populations) and the benefits provided to the public by these products. **Issues** are anything that stands in the way of meeting objectives. **Strategies** are opportunities to meet objectives or solutions to stated issues.

The teams were given decision making authority within the general direction of the Department, i.e. its policies and mandates. If the Department felt that team decisions conflicted with mandates or policies, the Department revised those portions of the program plan to resolve any conflict. The plan that follows is the result of the work of the teams and Department personnel.